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DEA FOR ROBERT CASSITTA

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SUBJECT: BULGARIA AND COUNTERNARCOTICS: INTENSIFYING OUR COOPERATION

¶1. Summary: The Bulgarian Government is acutely aware of the problems posed by transit across the Balkan region of narcotics and particularly of heroin from Afghanistan. The Minister of Interior contacted Ambassador to press for intensified cooperation with the US Drug Enforcement Agency, both in terms of increased case work and expanded training. The Minister underscored Bulgaria's desire to address the narcotics challenge and its need for urgent assistance from DEA. The Minister also stressed his view that greater cooperation between Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia was long overdue. Our judgment is that we should take up this offer of expanded cooperation to combat the heavy narcotics transit in this region. Our limited engagement with the Bulgarians to date is not commensurate with the dimensions of the problem and the fact that the majority of Afghan heroin transits across this region. We should aim to establish a much more sustained DEA engagement here and use Bulgarian receptivity to boost their indigenous capability while also driving regional collaboration. End summary.

¶2. Interior Minister Mikov had a very successful visit to Washington October 20 - 24, with productive meetings with Acting DEA Administrator Leonhart, Dep. FBI Director Pistole, INL DAS Snyder, USSS, and DHS. Mikov told the Ambassador on his return that he is eager to step up cooperation with Turkey, Macedonia, and Serbia in the first instance on anti-narcotics operations. His aim: that Bulgaria target higher level narcotics drug lords. He especially wants to bulk up Bulgaria-Turkish operational and policy coordination.

And he looks to DEA to help provide practical, on ground training for his personnel. While he understands funding constraints and personnel issues, he requested that DEA agents to spend more time, more frequently here, and increased training.

¶3. We must take him up on his unparalleled openness that will increase operational effectiveness. He stressed that Bulgaria has the political will and needs better capacity to go after bigger fish, including home grown OC figures and corrupt officials. We propose the following:

-- monthly or at minimum bi-monthly visits by DEA Turkey here;  
-- longer TDY's during those visits;  
-- 2-3 specific practical training programs, ideally here where more Bulgarian agents can get trained at lower cost to the MOI, on priority areas DEA establishes; these can include "follow the money" and undercover training;

-- establishment of a joint Bulgarian-Turkish working group that targets at least one major cross border drug figure;  
-- U.S. direction to establishment of Bulgarian-Macedonian information sharing, assuming we can have confidence in the integrity of such cooperative ventures; and  
--longer term: possible shift of DEA agents here on a permanent basis, especially if there is a global re-positioning of assets given developments elsewhere.

¶4. Under domestic and international pressure to show immediate results, the Bulgarians are reaching out to us. Minor adjustments to include more Bulgarians in our training regimen strike us sensible and in our interests; so does seizing Mikov's offer to bulk up on cross border cooperation.

Combined with a continued diplomatic push to drive Bulgaria's political commitment, such steps will hold promise that we see actual results. Even in the midst of the MOI's massive turmoil and scandal related overhaul, the anti-narcotics unit has shown esprit de corps, and professionalism. We can help it to do even better.

McEldowney